



Fight Power with Spontaneity and Humor: An Interview with Dusan Makaveyev

Robert Sitton; James Roy MacBean; Ernest Callenbach; Dusan Makaveyev

Film Quarterly, Vol. 25, No. 2. (Winter, 1971-1972), pp. 3-9.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0015-1386%28197124%2F197224%2925%3A2%3C3%3AFPWSAH%3E2.0.CO%3B2-D>

Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ROBERT SITTON, JAMES ROY MacBEAN,
ERNEST CALLENBACH

Fight Power with Spontaneity and Humor: An Interview with Dusan Makaveyev

"In fact, humor is a mechanism of counter-repression, truth is a weapon of counter-repression, joy, all kinds of happiness and of creation are anti-repressive actions. There are always creative individuals who help open up people around them and provoke social change. So I said to myself, why not make a film which would make a start in this?"

—Makaveyev, POSITIF, No. 129.

NOTE: Makaveyev's new film *WR: Mysteries of the Organism* is preceded, in its American prints, by a title stating that it is in part a personal response to the life and teachings of Wilhelm Reich. This was evidently necessitated by the sharply critical reactions of some Reichians in New York, who attempted to enjoin circulation of the film. The interview, made the day after *WR* was shown at the San Francisco Festival, began with an extensive discussion of this situation, and the attitude of one of the protesting Reichians, and continued thus:

D.M.: He was so upset by the film that he wanted to censor it. Actually I don't believe—in fact I'm sure—that the way *he* is presented in the parts of the film where he is present is very correct and very good: documentary pieces. But he was not able to conceive that documentary parts together with fiction parts or other documents can compose some sort of more complicated film that says *more*: that expresses much more than the parts. This is the question of film montage, I think; and if we are now fifty years after the famous Russian theory by Pudovkin

and Eisenstein about montage, we can no longer speak simply of two pieces of film together giving a third meaning; now we know that two scenes together are giving a third meaning, and a number of scenes together are multiplying each sequence times each sequence, so it means we have thousands of meanings, in a collage film of the kind I am making. Now what was very important for me was to *preserve the integrity of every piece*. So that means I didn't mix into documentary shots with his patients; or there is stock footage of Reich and his collaborators, and the commentary that is run over it is some sort of just interpretation of what people were talking about then. The film is very complicated; there is a lot of playing in the film; but I never played in the separate pieces, I kept them as separate blocs. Because I wanted the film to be some kind of vehicle for important information, that is kept covered by ignorance or the so-called conspiracy of silence. [Above all,] I wanted to give wide circulation to information about Reich himself.

E.C.: I was remembering John Huston's film about Freud, and I wondered if you would say why you thought in terms of a collage film rather than a straight narrative film—which might have pleased the Reichians more.

D.M.: Well, the Huston film *Freud* shows clearly that it's very difficult to make nowadays a good biographical film. In fact I think one of the last good biographical films was *Young Edison*, with Mickey Rooney, an Andy Hardy sort of movie—that film influenced me greatly, I was really moved, because the guy ran away from



*Makaveyev
arranging
the
severed
head of
Milena
Dravic:
WR.*

school and became famous! I saw it when I was ten, or something like that. But we can't make this kind of melodramatic biographical movie about important people like Freud or Reich—I think that's almost impossible. And actually I thought for years about how Reich could be explained.

Somebody told me that Paul Newman is trying to make a movie about Reich—probably his last years or his youth *can* be the subject for a good fiction film. In his youth he was a charismatic leader, a young doctor in the revolutionary movement in Germany, who tried to introduce sex and love into the revolutionary movement and keep the movement alive. But what happened to Reich actually: he started the Sexpol movement in Germany; in 1930 they had about 30,000 members and organized lectures all over Germany. Reich's ideal was that the Communist Party should organize youth around dance-halls, not to try to get young people to dull political lectures—to find young people where they really are. I even remember reading about young Nazis, members of the Hitlerjugend, coming to hear Reich and leaving the Nazi Party after getting a deeper under-

standing of their own inner troubles, their reasons for being politically active. I have heard from our ambassador in Paris—he attended Reich's lectures when he was a student in Prague in 1934—that there were thousands of students just all over the hall, sitting on windowsills and in the staircases, like Columbia in April '68, or Berkeley; and he was a kind of prophet of a new time, an affirmative culture—some kind of new integrity between man and his social life.

J.M.: Didn't Reich undergo quite a drastic evolution in his development? He started out by pointing out to his fellow Marxists that they were neglecting a very important realm of the psychosexual foundations of all behavior, and their political programs would never be effective if they continued to ignore these—but then he became more and more disenchanted and bitter at the Marxist movement's refusal to accept this, and finally felt that politics was the worst thing you could get into.

D.M.: What happened at the end of the Sexpol movement was that Reich was thrown out of it. It was organized by the Communist Party; and what he was teaching was too much for them. First they banned his books from all Party

bookstores; and then they organized a majority in the Sexpol movement and threw him out. It was just a few months before Hitler came to power, so it is not widely known. So you see first he was oppressed by people in his own movement. He was very devoted to the revolution, but he realized that the revolution didn't need him. And when Hitler came to power, his books were suppressed and then burned. And then it was repeated, in '56 and '57 by such a democratic government as the American one.

E.C.: His books were literally burned in New York, as you show in the film?

D.M.: Yes. Actually the Food & Drug Administration agents burned many books that Reich wrote before he came to the idea of the orgone accumulator [which was the ostensible basis of the FDA action].

Now going back to the previous point, Reich says that contemporary human beings have reactionary bodies—rigid bodies. And our characterological stiffness is rooted in muscular armor. Psychological armor equals muscular armor, on the biological level. And we are conditioned to be like that from our early months of life. So it seems that the task of changing people is much more complicated than it looks like if you just feel you can apply Marx's theories and make a redistribution of wealth or abolish private property, and everything will be OK. That's not true, because people are repeating—that's what happened in the whole so-called socialist world today: it's just one great repetition of all the rigidity of bourgeois society. So when I made my film *Man Is Not a Bird* I was trying to explain that you can have global changes but people can still stay the same, unhappy or awkward or privately confused; and in all my other films I try to follow this line, and I came gradually to Reich, who really explained *why* we are unable to change quickly. We *are* able to change, but not so quickly, and probably some people are unable to change at all.

R.S.: Did you just discover Reich after making *Man Is Not a Bird*?

D.M.: I knew his booklet *Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis*—where Reich explains the similarities between Marx and Freud in his opinion. . . .

R.S.: Do you think orgone accumulators really work?

D.M.: Well, I sat in an orgone accumulator in London—and I felt something. But some people claim that you can feel better in an orgone accumulator if you are ready. . . .

Reich was actually sent to prison for contempt of court. They chased him because of "illegal interstate sale of orgone accumulators"—devices that had not been scientifically proved. But then he didn't appear before the court; he said "Science has to judge me, and not an agency for food and cosmetics that is connected with the interests of the cosmetics industry." He was very angry, and had good reason to be. He got two years for contempt of court.

E.C.: What is your impression of the general public reception of the film? The time may be ripe now for a revival—a rehabilitation!—of Reich and his ideas.

D.M.: Well, at the Cannes festival they had to organize five additional screenings besides two official screenings—more and more people just kept coming. In Berlin the same; there was a very successful screening in Lucerne—that's the place where Reich was thrown out of the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1924. Then in New York and San Francisco we had enthusiastic receptions from festival crowds. So from people who are preconditioned to accept innovations the reception was extremely good. The film has opened publicly so far in Denmark, with six successful weeks in Copenhagen, and a very good press; we also had an extremely good press in England.

E.C.: Do the papers take the Reichian ideas in the film seriously, or are they mostly just pleased with the sexiness of the film?

D.M.: Well, I will tell you that we got a recommendation from the International Evangelical jury in Berlin—composed of priests and people connected with the ecumenical movement—and they gave a recommendation for the film to be seen and discussed on the subject of the "importance of eroticism, sexuality and love for political freedom." So it seems that people understand that the main topic of the film is not sexuality but human personal happiness connected with political freedom, which means men

in the social environment. Generally reactions in Europe were more political than sexual, to the effect that "sex is not so important in the film." (In fact, that's not true.) But it seems that people are getting the message that the main thing in sexual repression or sexual freedom is actually the political content of human personal freedom. But I don't know yet how many people will get this message. In Yugoslavia we got in trouble very quickly when we came back from Cannes [where the film won the grand prize].

A screening was organized by people hostile to the film—they got about 400 people, mainly older people, some of them connected with some sort of preservation of traditions, that means people who are taking care of monuments and graveyards and museums, plus old revolutionaries, so-called hard-liners who are now out of the main social activities and are on the margin of social life taking care of their memories of our glorious past—and they were mad. It was terrible. People just started shouting. It was an extremely unpleasant experience.

R.S.: On what grounds were they angry?

D.M.: Because Stalin was connected with sexuality! Stalin was connected with the phallus. And they are just completely unable to see *any* connection between political power and sexual potency; the sexual meaning of political power was completely strange to them, and they were completely sexually upset. They were sweating, trembling, a lot of physical signs: they were just showing complete physiological distress. But these reactions were expressed in very political terms: "politically unacceptable," "ideologically wrong," "attitude of the enemy," this kind of political cliché were all activated against the film.

R.S.: Have they banned the film?

D.M.: They succeeded in stopping it, so far, on administrative grounds, although we have the necessary signatures on the censorship board. But they didn't dare to send the police to take the film away from us; they don't want to fight us in the courts. Meanwhile new censor regulations have been set up and a new board has come in, so we are tied up in all this legal procedures business.

J.M.: Has the Yugoslav government granted an export visa?

D.M.: Actually we have no visas for export. Some people believe the film has to pass the censors before it goes abroad, but I don't believe our laws can be applied to foreign countries. Actually we passed the censors before we went to Cannes, and then in the meantime the film has been sold to about 10 or 15 countries. Besides the film has a German co-producer, so if they did try to stop it, he can sell the film abroad. And then if they stop the film completely in Yugoslavia, a distributor could import the film as a *German* film, and then it goes through another censorship, the one for foreign films! So we have several ways to fight this kind of hostility.

E.C.: The film contains some very satirical scenes against organized Communism—for instance that scene where the madman is banging his head against the wall and on the sound track is this hymn to the glorious Communist Party, "from which all our blessings flow," and so on. Is the film attacked as being anti-Communist, and if so how do you reply?

D.M.: It's interesting that the film was attacked on those grounds by a very tiny portion of Party members, and in fact not so much by Party members as by *ex-Party* members who were thrown out of the Party as Stalinists. It seems that for most people in the country it is clear that the film is not anti-Communist but anti-Stalinist.

J.M.: It's also anti-Leninist, however.

D.M.: Oh, no, that's not true. The film is discussing some points in Leninism, or about Lenin, but the film is not anti-Lenin, in my opinion. Even some people in high Party positions told me the film is clearly anti-Stalinist, and the film is clearly against blocs, and the film is for independent communism or independent socialism. So it seems many people understood the film politically as an honest contribution to inner discussion in the communist movement.

Now about Leninism. In the film you have direct quotations from Lenin in two places: one is where the awkward Russian figure-skating champion is trying to talk to the Yugoslavian revolutionary girl, and they have no other way

to talk with each other but to whisper political ideas in a very tender way: so they speak about "what are the tasks of youth," and this is an exact quotation from Lenin.

J.M.: And the other is the statement about the Appassionata Sonata and how it makes him want to treat people nicely and pat them on the head, when what is needed at this time is to hit them over the head.

D.M.: Yeah, because he believed that we must *change* people. Lenin was a true neurotic, a man torn by his wish to change people and the world, and his wish to help people. So I think to talk about Leninism in terms of a theoretical outcome of a deep wish to change—this is an effort to understand, both to criticize and to understand, but I don't think it is just hostile if you are critical. And then if you remember the moment when the Russian says, "In principle we are against any violence," and she touches him on the most important part of his, uh, revolutionary organism, which he is trying to forget—and then he hits her. So at the moment he turns to pure violence. You remember what is the next shot? She looks at him, but he is not there any more: there is Stalin. Stalin crying. That's a beautiful shot, and I took it [from a Russian feature]. Stalin watches the bench in the snow where Lenin used to sit, and he is crying. This is pure demagoguery, and I loved this scene for its shallowness, this kind of kitsch quality, surrealist qualities. But I introduced it into the film at a moment connected with Lenin. Of course everything is distorted a little, or made into caricature, because the music that follows the skater Vladimir Ilyitch's speech—he is a kind of positive hero, beautiful, an artist—not the real Lenin, he is kind of a marzipan reincarnation—that music is of course *not* the Appassionata but some Hungarian gypsy music entitled "Like a Beautiful Dream": low-level music, not Beethoven. So there is another shift in meaning between his speech and the music on the sound track. Then if you remember the scene that follows, Stalin is receiving a letter that is addressed to Lenin. So I think that Stalin is the worst possible reincarnation of Lenin—all forceful features of Lenin, all Lenin's efforts to change things forcefully, they were reincar-



"What are the tasks of youth . . ."

nated in Stalin. This is the part of Lenin's revolutionary program that I can't agree upon; because forceful change can't bring change: that's I think very simple.

E.C.: Do you think that traditional "organized communism" is inherently anti-sex? Can the anti-body, anti-sex attitude of the traditional left be escaped?

D.M.: I think it is not only communist organization that has been anti-sex; it seems to me that *all* organization in the world—look at the churches, look at governments, look at the police, the army, everything is anti-sex; the essentially homosexual structure of the whole government is completely hidden; we have only males in business, in politics, in the army and police—so all that is a pure continuation of boyhood; this kind of homosexual male period is projected into the structure of the whole society, so women are completely outside of the image of any kind of meaningful social organization. They are kept just to medicine, teaching, and "humanitarian" cages, completely out of the main power structure.

The only movements that were connected with the body were fascist movements: they were talking about blood, and earth, and body, but again in I think a different kind of homosexual overtones, and not in a fully heterosexual meaning.

It seems to me that the sexual significance of movements and organizations is completely destroyed in our alienated style of living. And my idea was to build a movie that is a kind of

interplay between organization and spontaneity. For it seems to me that the all-anarchism of, let's say, the New American Cinema or the anarchism of the New Left, this kind of totally unorganized way in which people are now reacting to power structures, is inefficient because it lacks organization; yet if it turns to organization it takes the same old forms, like the highly organized, militant, puritan, self-sacrificing groups, so this just perpetuates the old system of power and fighting power with power. And it seems to me that we have to fight power with spontaneity and humor, but in a more organized way than it is done. It seems to me that some future society which I believe in, a society organized on work and love without any political mediators—work, love, and communication, let's say—must be a highly organized kind of society that has a lot of space for all kinds of spontaneous activities. In my film—I worked eight months on it in the editing room to get this kind of strong organization, yet trying to preserve all the spontaneity possible in the film. And I feel that's the reason it is puzzling: people are not sure where I am leading them.

Actually the film is very traditionally structured. There are the first three reels of documentary introduction, and then we have this very slow dramatic exposition, then we have the conflict say in reels five and six, and those highly emotional things in reel eight—the plaster-caster scene, which is a kind of climactic scene; and then you have a melodramatic continuation in reels nine and ten which in purely dramatic terms explain this conflict between personality and society: "You are able to love mankind but you are not able to love a human person." (The women's libbers are very happy with this scene, where she is hitting him trying to awaken him to real masculinity instead of this empty masculinity.) And then you have this kind of cathartic song at the end. So as you see the whole structure is very traditional: you are supposed to be relaxed for a few reels, then puzzled, then you have a build-up of the conflict, then the big chase, and then you have catharsis! But this traditional organization is completely invisible in my film: there are a lot of other attractions, and they are done in this

kind of open-structure way so that everybody is projecting his own thing into the film. I call it the "liberating trap"—an open structure that forces people to throw their own irrationalities into the film. There are so many things left unanswered, so many questions posed—you must answer them in order to be able to "survive," to be able to follow the story, to go on. And there is not time enough left for thinking, just for projecting your own wrong ideas, your own misinterpretations, your own irrationalities into the film—but then to go on. At the end many people are very restless, puzzled, confused—but highly interested in the subject. They're ready to come see the film again, to read more Reich, to ask me about all kinds of things.

R.S.: The things that seem to interest you in America seem to be things which are outside the official culture, they're the alternative culture things, and they have the spontaneity and freedom which comes from being an alternative. Will spontaneity in the world of the future be built into the system, or will it always have to come from outside?

D.M.: I am very skeptical about systems, living in a country which is not in this big bloc of "freedom-loving" nations in NATO, and also is not in the big bloc of "freedom-loving" nations in the Warsaw Pact; in Yugoslavia we don't see very many differences between life in America and Russia as far as big ideas are concerned: these big, beautiful, patriotic ideas that enable big countries to smash small countries and kill people in the name of humanity, or impose their own systems of values on others. So I think these big superpowers may have the same policy on the global level. On a practical level of course America is very different from Russia—because in Russia each individual has his own happiness delivered to him by the government or Party, and here everybody has to fight for his own happiness in the market. But it seems to me the sets of illusions are very similar, and the inflexibility of the two systems is very similar. Of course the American system is much more flexible in responding to the market, but politically many things that are against all economy are perpetuated. So more and more, all over the world, people feel that something

must be done: systems that start from people spontaneously organizing themselves in some sort of meaningful groups, and then *not* alienating their power to some sort of more "representative" higher levels—just preserving their own communal power. I think the new means of communication that we have in the media, in this electronic world, enable us to live in our small ethnic groups, or very specific groups, yet being able to communicate all over the globe without the necessity of having this type of power structure to mediate in our names. I believe in a world without states, a world without politicians, without these political structures representing alienated power.

R.S.: A kind of loosely structured anarchy?

D.M.: No, a kind of well organized anarchy! I think the failure of world communism to do anything meaningful is that it built some sort of very militant, Christian-style militancy of fighting for a paradise that will come for our grandchildren, and for them we must put ourselves through the fire; and this leads to terrible things, like millions of people put in concentration camps by their own comrades, and many of them in the camps even believing that the camps were good for the system. You remember that many people died shouting "Long live Stalin!" even when they were being killed on Stalin's orders. This self-sacrificing revolutionism is the same kind of religious, Judeo-Christian kind of bullshit.

RICHARD L. KENNEY

American Cinematic Form

When people think to praise a work by calling it art, they often also mean to set it off into a safe, "cultural" category where it can't do any harm. Even in a rambunctiously commercial art like film, distinctions between life and art have been glib and unexamined. The following article makes some startling proposals about these basic assumptions, and suggests some particularly American aspects of the search for new cinematic forms.

1 America

"Listen to the States asserting: 'The hour has struck! Americans shall be American. The USA is now grown up artistically. It is time we ceased to hang on to the skirts of Europe, or to behave like schoolboys let loose from European schoolmasters.'" That is D. H. Lawrence, the European, opening his *Studies in Classic American Literature*. America has evolved a literature,

created it and perceived it according to the peculiarities of the North American continent, and the special forms of the life there. With a new cinema in Europe and intimations of one here, now the American will try to discover his original relation to film. I am interested in the forms which will define that relation.

The question, Would the American find an original relation to literature? was met by the